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In the introduction to this short biography of Bartholomew Gosnold, Harold Wilson states that he wishes to “rescue Bartholomew Gosnold from historical obscurity,” (p.10) and that he believes Gosnold “was one of the great, unsung heroes of American history” but that “today, many Americans have never heard of him” (p. 9). Wilson’s statement regarding Gosnold’s relative obscurity is unclear as there are over one hundred primary and secondary sources in his selected bibliography. Perhaps the reason that few people have heard of Gosnold has less to do with his importance and more with the way American schools teach history today.

Wilson declares, “The story of Bartholomew Gosnold begins in about the year 1001 A.D. when Leif Erikson and his men sailed southwesterly from their home in Greenland” (p.11). Wilson then devotes the remainder of his first chapter to a brief history of the voyages of the Vikings and the early English adventurers Sir Humphrey Gilbert and Captain Edward Hayes. The rumor spreading around England at that time was that Giovanni da Verrazzano, an Italian sailing for the French, had visited a “beautiful country on the North American coast” (p.13). The land became known as Norumbega and England thought it was a utopia – gold, crystals, fertile soil – everything that England was looking for to help them replenish their treasury that had been severely depleted due to recent wars with France and Spain. Both enemies of England claimed that this area belonged to them. English geographer and writer, Richard Hakluyt contended that England’s claim was more legitimate because John Cabot discovered North America, where this bountiful land was located, in 1497 while sailing for England (p.14).

Wilson dedicates several chapters to Gosnold’s early life including his schooling and his acquaintance with people of station in Elizabethan England. Gosnold’s father was a successful lawyer and his mother was a relative of Sir Francis Bacon. Gosnold’s upbringing brought him into contact with the best families of England. He received his BA in Law from Cambridge University in 1590 and entered “New Inn, one of the Inns of Chancery, a “farm team” of the Middle Temple, the famous Inn of Court” (p.20). While an attorney, his true love

was the sea and exploration, due to exposure to the lectures of Richard Hakluyt (p.21).

Wilson traces Gosnold's voyage to America and his exploration of the coast of what is now Cape Cod, Martha's Vineyard, and the Elizabeth Islands. He gives Gosnold credit for the naming of Cape Cod (for the abundance of cod that his sailors were able to catch), Martha's Vineyard (named after his daughter who died as an infant), and the Elizabeth Islands (named for his sister). Wilson includes a lengthy description of the rough seas that Gosnold's ship encountered by a breach thereafter named "Tucker's Terror." Wilson states, "[If] Gosnold had not escaped the fury of Tucker's Terror . . . the founding of Jamestown may not have occurred and what is now the United States would not be an English-speaking nation" (p.48). The author gives Gosnold far more credit for the settlement of Jamestown than is warranted.

Wilson dedicated his final chapters to Gosnold's voyage to America that resulted in the settling of Jamestown, Virginia, the first permanent English settlement in the New World. After the death of Queen Elizabeth and the ascension of James I to the throne, peace with Spain put a hold on England's colonization projects. However, on July 15, 1605, a treaty ratified by King Philip III of Spain stated, "Spain would treat English colonies as legal ventures," (p.93) opening the door for Gosnold and other adventurers to organize a new voyage with the intent of establishing a permanent English settlement in North America. Two years later on April 26, 1607, Gosnold's expedition sailed up the Chesapeake Bay and began the task of establishing a colony in the New World. When they sailed, the adventurers did not know whom England designated to be their leaders until they opened a strongbox after their arrival. Gosnold's name was first on the list followed by John Smith, Edward Wingate, John Ratcliffe, and others. These men were to be the Governing Council of the new settlement. The leaders finally selected a point approximately eighty miles up the James River for the location of their settlement. Gosnold disagreed with this location because of its low marshy ground and its infestation with insects. Gosnold lost this argument, and they established Jamestown. After months of discontent, shortages of food, attacks by natives, and damp weather, the settlers' morale was low and a sickness, probably dysentery, began to take its toll. Gosnold was stricken with a fever in August of 1607, and after suffering for two weeks died on August 22, barely four months after his arrival in Virginia (p.105).

While Wilson did an admirable job in his attempt to “rescue Bartholomew Gosnold,” the book was a bit amateurish for a volume marketed to adult readers and appeared geared more towards a middle school audience. Wilson provides extensive primary and secondary sources but does not cite his references in the book, an unfortunate gap. Wilson devoted much of his book to Gosnold’s adventures around Cape Cod and the Islands rather than to the settlement of Jamestown, despite his claim that the settlement of Jamestown was due, in large part, to the abilities and efforts of Bartholomew Gosnold. It is not clear that Wilson adds any new information to that already available on the subject.